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F.B.I. Hunt for Ray in Dr. King's Killing Stuns Prison Officials and Others Who Knew Him

By DOUGLAS E. KNEELAND
Special to The New York Times

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo., April 22 — Prison officials and inmates at the state penitentiary here are still stunned that James Earl Ray, a convict who escaped a year ago, has been accused of conspiring in the slaying of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Last Wednesday the Federal Bureau of Investigation named Eric Starvo Galt, described as a 36-year-old "loner," a neat dresser and avid dancer, as a conspirator in the assassination April 4 of Dr. King in Memphis, Tenn.

Newspapers with pictures and sketches of Galt circulated behind the gray walls of the old penitentiary on the Missouri River, but no word of recognition was heard along the prison grapevine.

On Friday, the F.B.I. said Galt was Ray, a 40-year-old habitual criminal who escaped from the penitentiary here April 23, 1967, after having served seven years of a 20-year sentence for armed robbery.

Warden Harold R. Swenson said in an interview last night that the F.B.I. had not notified officials here before the announcement. Nor, he added, has any representative of the agency come to Jefferson City to look at Ray's record or interview prisoners who knew him.

'Doesn't Shape Up'

"I was floored," the white-haired warden said. "This guy's penny-ante. It doesn't shape up, does it?"

Thumbing through Rays' records, noting that his work reports in food service here were "pretty good," Mr. Swenson, who has been in prison work nearly 30 years, mostly in the Federal system, shook his head. "He's innocuous," he said. "Pennyante."

Noting that the pictures of Galt had meant nothing to the staff and that there had been no reaction from the inmates, the warden added: "If there's anyone who'd talk, it's the prisoners. Once a guy's gone they'll talk."

An aide strolled into the warden's office and interrupted. "We've got 2,000 prisoners in here," he said, "and none of them recognized him."

Continuing with Ray's file, Mr. Swenson said that the prisoner had received permission for four persons to visit him: two brothers, Jerry and John, his mother, Mrs. Lucille Ryan, and his grandmother, Mrs. Mary Maher. All were listed at the same address, 1913 Hickory Street, St. Louis. But the warden said the file did not show whether any of them had visited Ray.

Aside from escape attempts in 1961 and 1966 the warden said, Ray was not a trouble-maker in prison. His file showed only two minir disciplinary reports—one for trying to smuggle cigarettes and other contraband to a hospitalized prisoner and another for refusing to work. That is a hihly unusual record, Mr. Swenson explained.

"He wasn't a big dealer," the warden went on. "We know these people. I've got 125 pictures here—he wasn't in that group. I was shocked. It didn't make any sense to me."

Prisoner Nervous

Another prison official, who asked not to be identified, came into the warden's second-floor office.

"This would seem foreign to the nature of the man up to this point," the official said.

Although it is against his policy, Warden Swenson agreed, because of national interest in the case, to allow an interview with the prisoner who had been closest to Ray, who was known as a close-mouthed loner without real friends or enemies. A condition of the interview was that the inmate would not be identified.

The prisoner, the work shirt of his faded green uniform open over a stained white T-shirt, entered the warden's office hesitantly. The other prisoners were wondering, he explained nervously, why he was being questioned.

Seated at a table in front of the warden's desk, dragging deeply on a cigarette, he slowly relaxed.

Shown a picture of Galt and asked if that was his friend, Ray, he shook his head vigorously.

"No, sir, not this," he insisted. "I guess I knew him about as well as anybody. He was here when I came here, in 1960. I knew him from about 1962, well, I associated with him right up to 1966 when he tried to escape."

'Just Couldn't Believe It'

Struggled for words as he tried to capture Ray's personality, the prisoner started to talk:

"I just don't know how to explain it," he said. "He was just the type of guy who took a long time, well, if you didn't know anybody he knew, well...

"The picture with the bow tie on [the F.B.I. photo of Galt], nobody thinks it's him. They think it's a different guy altogether. We think it's two different people altogether.

"Now they [the prisoners] say they're just trying to pin it on him because he escaped from here. They think they've got to lay it on somebody, so they're trying to lay it on him.

"I just couldn't believe it myself. If the man did kill that man, it had to be for money. That would be the only thing. He didn't seem like the kind of guy who would kill anybody. He was the type of guy, you didn't fool with him, but he didn't fool with anybody.

"He wasn't the type of guy to tell you anything about himself. He never actually did come out and tell you what he did when he was outside. Anytime you'd get in a conversation with him it would be about money. A dollar here and a dollar there.

"He talked about money all the time. Trying to figure a way to make a dollar. Just little things. Maybe he'd buy something for a little bit and sell it for a little bit more. If a guy owed him anything, he'd bug him all the time. He didn't get into fights with them, but he'd hound them."

Ray did not smoke, the prisoner said, and "didn't say anything about girls," although he liked to read "sex magazines." Neither, he added, did Ray show any interest in dancing or Western and country music, which the F. B. I. said were favorites of Galt.

In addition to "sex magazines," the prisoner added, Ray

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liked to read secret agent books.

Puzzling for a minute, thinking, he went on:

"I think the President even liked that book—James Bond—he liked James Bond." [President Kennedy was known as a reader of the late Ian Fleming's spy novels.]

As for politics, the prisoner said:

"He just didn't seem to be interested in it."

Negroes?

"He didn't dislike them. He didn't associate with them one way or the other. Although I think he did talk with them."

Ray did have another interest. Body building.

"He has a lot better build than a lot of people think he has. He did a lot of physical exercising, a lot of weight lifting and pull-ups and things like that."

Did Ray ever talk about what he would do when he got out?

"Actually, he never talked much about outside anyway," the prisoner said. "He just talked about getting outside. Everyone talks about getting out. He wanted out any way he could get out."

"I think he did say something once about getting in the maritime union," the prisoner added.

The man known as Galt is said to have identified himself at times as an unemployed merchant seaman.

Physically, Ray could fit some descriptions given of the man sought in the slaying of Dr. King. Records show him to be about 5 feet 11 inches tall, weighing between 160 and 170 pounds.

Some questions have been raised about his age since the suspect described by some persons in Memphis was said to be younger than 40.

"I don't believe he'd look 40," his prisoner friend said. "I don't believe he'd go for the 20's either. I'd say somewhere right around 30."

Warden Swenson agreed.

But taking issue with another description of the man called Galt, the prisoner added: "He wasn't what you'd call a neat dresser in here."

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Dr. King Sr. Tells Of Threats Since Slaying of Son

DETROIT (AP) — The Rev. Martin Luther King Sr. says he received a threatening telephone call the day after his son was buried, and, "I'll have to listen now since they did make good."

"But," he said, "I'm still unafraid. I'm going to preach continually as I always have." He said he has been getting "dangerous calls" for a long time.

The elder King, pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, spoke at a news conference in Detroit yesterday.

His visit to Detroit had been scheduled before Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was shot in Memphis, Tenn., by an assassin April 4.

His late son "was 39 years ahead of his age," said the elder King, who pledged "to do all I can to carry out the program and commitment of my son," and asserted that unless the United States faces up to its racial problems, all will be lost.

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King Slaying Suspect Held Racist, Drug User

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Convicts who served time with James Earl Ray, the man wanted in the slaying of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., have told authorities Ray was a racist and a habitual user of amphetamines while in prison, it was learned today.

Ray, object of a manhunt that [illegible] on the way to Mexico and [illegible] served sentences in Illinois, California, Missouri and the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kan. Some of his fellow prisoners have described him as an anti-Negro loner, who spent much of his time in jail reading sex books and girlie magazines.

The FBI declined comment on the accounts of Ray as a racist and user of pep pills.

The FBI also had nothing to say bout reports that his sister, Melba Ryan of [illegible]ney, Ill., thought he might have gone back to Germany where he served part of his three-year Army hitch from early [illegible] until he was given a general discharge in late 1958 for lack of adaptability to GI life.

Mrs. Ryan said her brother, now 30, thoroughly enjoyed his tour of duty in Germany. She thought it likely he might have returned there if he was trying to hide.

The FBI has printed [illegible] of wanted posters in Spanish for distribution in Mexico where Ray is known to have gone at some point after his escape on April 23, 1967, from the Missouri State Penitentiary in Jefferson City.

Ray's far-ranging travels after his escape is one of the major question marks facing investigators.

During the year from the date of his escape until April 4 when King was shot to death in Memphis, Tenn., Ray is said to have journeyed 19,000 miles.

He paid more than $2,000 for a white Mustang, took expensive lessons in dancing studios and bartending schools and traveled from Birmingham to New Orleans, to California, to Mexico, to New Orleans again, then to Atlanta, and finally to Memphis, investigators say.

He has been connected with the car and rifle believed to have been used by King's slayer by his fingerprints and is wanted by the FBI on a warrant charging conspiracy in the death of King as well as for being a fugitive from the Missouri prison system.

Investigators do not know how Ray financed his purchases, his day-by-day expenses or his travels without any known job during the period after his escape.

Investigators are hopeful that widespread circulation of his photos and fingerprints, plus the $50,000 in reward money offered for his apprehension, will lead them to Ray. Thousands of leads have been received and all are being checked out.

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